

# FEST members help build secure facility to store evidence from Iraq's former regime

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Physical evidence may be the only witness for the many voiceless victims of Iraq's former regime and the Ba'ath Party. Protecting the material evidence collected for future prosecution of criminal acts is the function of a state-of-the-art secure evidence storage facility being built in Baghdad with funding from the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID).

Helping make that facility tamper, theft, and attack proof, two members of the Baghdad Central Forward Engineer Support Team (FEST) serving the Coalition Provisional Authority recently completed the cost and design work for renovation of a former prison cell block. Designing a secure evidence storage facility went beyond the scope of a normal FEST task, and showed how the team members' experience with U.S. Army Corps of Engineers military construction projects can benefit Iraqis seeking justice.

Peter Gauer, project manager with the Baghdad Central FEST, said that facility will be important when cases go to trial because it will enable the prosecution to assure the court that evidence was secure from tampering and that it was stored at the optimum climatic conditions. Due to the volatility of the cases involved, the facility must also protect the evidence from theft and deliberate attempts at destruction, he said.

To make the evidence as safe as possible, a cell block was selected for conversion because it had suitably thick reinforced concrete walls and roof, according to Lloyd Foster, cost estimator with the Baghdad Central FEST.

Gauer and Foster were invited along on an initial site visit to help define a scope of work, but their prior experience with security technology made them key players in the project's development. Gauer and Foster had worked together before on secure structures known as Special Compartmentalized Information Facilities, or SCIFs, giving them valuable background. Foster, a cost estimator with Albuquerque District, and Gauer from the Construction Division of the Los Angeles District, first met when working together on facilities for U.S. Air Force's Unmanned Aerial Vehicle at Nellis Air Force Base, Nevada.

Gauer said their experience came into play, as they were able to present ideas the others on the site assessment visit were not familiar with.

Foster said an Iraqi architectural engineering firm representative was with the group. "When we

recommended they put in certain types of security panels, where various systems are integrated into one panel, he got the 'deer in the headlights' look," he said. When Foster asked the representative if they had such systems in Iraq, he was reminded of the impact of the 13 years of embargo.

"These guys are smart. Their engineers are as good as we've got. But technology has left them behind," Foster said. "But they're going to catch up. I'm telling you, it won't take them long."

Because the FEST was knowledgeable about requirements for secure facilities, they were asked to provide a scope of work to be used in beginning the project design, Gauer said. About four weeks after the site visit, the FEST submitted an estimate and scope of work and about six weeks later submitted the final estimate and

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U.S. Army photo by Marilyn Phipps

**Lloyd Foster, a cost estimator from Albuquerque District, takes rough measurements during an initial site visit in Baghdad.**